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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY ENGAGEMENT IN
QATAR

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(SBU) KEY POINTS

-- Qatar is using its current hydrocarbon-fueled wealth to invest in educational reform and science and technology (S&T). The Qatar Foundation is the primary vehicle for these initiatives.

-- Qatar does not need USG money, but does need help developing skills and capacity. It would be a logical host for conferences or summits envisaged under any USG initiatives.

-- Specific partnerships determined through political engagement are most likely to garner Qatari participation and funding.

-- Addressees are encouraged to review reftel from March 2009 which covers Embassy's assessment of key trends in Qatar - including S&T - over the next 36 months and the Embassy's associated interagency synchronization planning.

(SBU) COMMENT

-- Enhanced USG engagement on S&T would be welcomed by Qatar and boost two of the strongest parts of our bilateral relationship: the commercial and educational pillars. But dedicated additional staff would be needed for any strategic-level initiatives.

End Key Points and Comment.

[1](#)1. (SBU) SCOPE NOTE: Qataris have generally responded positively to President Obama's overtures to the Arab and Muslim world and, like many others in this region, hold deep admiration for U.S. education and S&T achievements. Qatar's successful efforts to engage - even import - the U.S. educational model and U.S. private sector expertise indicate the USG would be pushing on an open door by further pursuing such engagement. Embassy Doha provides the assessment below to give Washington readers a flavor of the current S&T scene in Qatar as specific outreach and programs are crafted; the examples cited below are illustrative, not exhaustive.

Qatar's Progressive Vision for Education

[1](#)2. (SBU) Qatar ranks high on most development indicators and enjoys an enviable economic position due to its massive hydrocarbon exports. However, senior Qatari leadership -

above all the Amir and his high-profile wife Shaykha Mozah - realize that Qatar must develop a diversified, knowledge-based economy to assure the country continues to thrive over the long-term. To that end, the GOQ is implementing remarkable reforms at all levels of education.

-- Independent Schools. The RAND Corporation, which has closely advised the GOQ and has one of its two overseas branch offices in Doha, tells us that Qatar is undertaking the most ambitious educational reform project it has ever seen, anywhere in the world. Qatar currently has 89 independent schools similar in function to charter schools in the U.S. These schools are required to comply with the GOQ's national curriculum standards, which are currently being modified to match international baccalaureate standards. The schools emphasize the importance of parental contributions, community involvement and effective Boards of Trustees.

Qatar Foundation: A Catalyst for Change and Advancement

13. (U) The Qatar Foundation (QF) is the primary vehicle for the GOQ's massive investments in education, science and technology, and related social programs. QF and a constellation of affiliated organizations and initiatives are run by Shaykha Mozah and other royal family members. (More information is available at: www.qf.edu.qa).

-- Education City. QF's flagship project is a 2,500-acre campus in Doha which hosts branch campuses of 6 U.S. universities, each focused on a particular academic specialty: Texas A&M University (engineering),

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Carnegie-Mellon University (computer science, business), Weill-Cornell Medical College (medicine), Georgetown School of Foreign Service (political science and international affairs), Virginia Commonwealth University (design), and Northwestern University (journalism). QF intends to import more American universities, as well as several high schools and a community college. (Note: In this sense, Qatar is unique in the world, because it is not only seeking to modernize its educational system on an American model, but is actually importing high-quality American institutions to help them achieve that goal.)

-- The Qatar Science and Technology Park (QSTP) is another of QF's major entities and was formally opened in March 2009. The park has 22 high-profile tenants, including major U.S. firms such as ExxonMobil, ConocoPhillips, GE, and Microsoft. QSTP is intended to foster industry-university collaboration at Qatar's Education City and is focused on promoting research, commercialization, and technology/knowledge-transfer to Qatar from these firms in four areas: energy, environment, health care, and information/communication technology. (More information is available at: www.qstp.org.qa)

-- The Qatar National Research Fund (QNRF) provides millions in funding to original research in natural sciences, engineering and technology, medical and health sciences, agricultural services, social sciences and humanities. USD 45 million was made available for awards in 2008. During the 2007-2008 cycle, 47 collaborative research applications were approved involving 33 international institutions.

-- "Stars of Science" is a new QF-supported reality TV show, broadcast in 17 Arab countries, which covers an innovation competition among Arab youth. The team with the winning invention will be awarded USD 300,000.

-- QF recently opened a Washington office to work on implementing educational projects across cultures. The organization receives its funding from QF but is technically a separately registered 501 (c)(3) organization with its own U.S.-majority board. The Executive Director of QF-U.S. is a

former FSO and eager to engage the USG on collaborative projects.

Policy Imperatives

14. (SBU) As the USG considers launching new S&T initiatives and partnerships with the Arab and Muslim world, Embassy Doha believes Washington should be aware of the following Qatar-specific factors:

-- Qatar does not generally need USG money. Qatar provides full educational funding for all of its citizens. The GOQ has obligated itself to providing 2.8 percent of its GDP to research. (Note: This would comprise just under USD 3 billion in 2008, though the mechanics of how this money will be spent remain unclear to us.)

-- Qatar does need help addressing systemic weaknesses in human capacity. While almost 2 million people live in Qatar, a mere 225,000 are Qatari nationals. There is little indigenous scientific capacity (i.e., there are few Qatari scientists to engage).

-- Qatar has significant hotel, conference, and exhibition capacity and would be a logical leader to host large conferences or summits. The GOQ sees such events as a way to boost its prestige and spur local action in the area covered by the event. It generally ends up paying much of the administrative cost. In the past year, Qatar has hosted major events with the participation of USG officials and prominent Americans, such as the UN Financing for Development Follow-Up Conference, the Montreal Protocol (Ozone) Conference, the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) Conference, and the Brookings U.S.-Islamic World Forum.

-- As Qatar reforms its K-12 educational system, it is acutely aware of the need for quality textbooks and learning resources in science and other areas. For example, the head of the Independent School Committee recently told us that Qatar needs 180,000 new, quality books in science and math for its preparatory and secondary schools.

-- Qatar, like much of the Gulf, is experiencing a hydrocarbon-fueled building boom. After several years of

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seeing energy-inefficient skyscrapers constructed in Doha, the GOQ and leading environmental voices are starting to latch onto the "Green Buildings" movement. U.S. advice, expertise, and technology could be crucial in helping Qatar's development proceed in an eco-friendly and technologically-advanced manner.

15. (SBU) Successful engagement with Qatar calls for showing respect for its leaders' vision for education and creating partnerships to address areas of joint interest. The U.S. private sector is already the leading partner in Qatar's efforts, and expanded USG involvement should be tailored to complement this successful partnership.

-- One example of the sort of partnership Qatar prefers is a joint British Pound 250 million fund established between the Qatar Investment Authority (Qatar's sovereign wealth fund) and the UK-based Carbon Trust. The QIA contributed 150 million and the fund intends to invest in clean energy technology and technology transfer to Qatar. The fund is the result of high-level political engagement between the British and Qatari Prime Ministers, and the agreement was signed during Gordon Brown's November 2008 visit to Doha.

-- The GOQ is open to working with the USG on specific development projects throughout the region, and has shown a predilection for education projects. However, due to policy differences on certain issues and a Qatari desire to directly oversee disbursement of its funds, these would have to be

coordinated on an individual basis. Joint educational projects hold much promise; the QF-affiliated Reach Out to Asia (ROTA) Foundation is working on educational initiatives with partner NGOs in northern Iraq, Pakistan, and Afghanistan.

¶6. (SBU) Education City has all the makings of a "center of excellence" for education and S&T thanks to the participation of U.S. educational institutions. If the USG were to approach QF or Education City under any new initiative, we would need to think through exactly what "value-added" could be provided by the USG.

-- At a minimum, the novel experiment of importing U.S. higher education at QF's Education City calls for rethinking the current framework and restrictions on USG funding, such as through the National Science Foundation (NSF). A recent visit to Qatar by a senior NSF official revealed a strong interest at Education City in applying for USG funding. However, the current funding system may not be positioned to accommodate collaborative research projects abroad, even those involving U.S. institutions and researchers.

A Final Thought: Devote Staff to the Initiative

¶7. (SBU) The points above indicate there is much opportunity, and much to be done, to follow-through on the President's speech and the Administration's intentions to boost S&T and other partnerships with the Arab and Muslim world. From Post's perspective, such engagement would reinforce two of the strongest pillars of the bilateral relationship - our educational and commercial engagement. However, this wider engagement will also require an increase in staffing to focus on these issues. Post's sole Economic Officer already covers the full range of economic issues such as energy (oil and gas), terror finance, civil aviation security, and other high-priority issues. Adding one more requirement to an already full plate will not allow these issues the attention they deserve.

LeBaron